

MOTHER EARTH, MOTHER AFRICA & AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS



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THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Theological reflections on
sustainable development goals
and Mother Earth

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Abstract

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2015). However, there is a shift in the understanding of sustainable development as it was stipulated in the MDGs and how sustainable development is defined in the SDGs. The SDGs are applicable to countries in the Global South and in the Global North, unlike the MDGs that focused mainly on countries in the Global South. The MDGs focused on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, gender inequality, as well as on improving education, health and forming global partnerships. However, the SDGs integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental. The SDGs, therefore, include building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, protecting human rights, promoting gender equality and the need to protect Mother Earth and its natural resources by combating climate change and protecting oceans and forests.

In analysing the SDGs critically, it is evident that the religious dimension is missing. The religious dimension is nevertheless critical, as Oduyoye (2001) argues that religion determines the shaping of the moral, social, political and economic dimensions of many societies in Africa. Religion influences how people relate to each other and the environment. In the African world view, there is no separation between the sacred and secular as it is holistic in its perspective. Religion is an element of people's identity and it influences the core of the lives of people in Africa. Hence, an agenda for sustainable development should not exclude religion.

This chapter engages Mercy Amba Oduyoye's (2001) four central themes of doing theology in Africa as the theological lens in its analysis of sustainable development goals, with a focus on understanding Mother Earth. Her book, *Introducing African women's theology* (Oduyoye, 2001), addresses theological themes that entail a holistic approach to sustainable development in the African context. These themes are: (1) community and wholeness, (2) relatedness and interrelationships, (3) reciprocity and justice, and (4) compassion and solidarity.

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These theological themes describe the characteristics of traditional life in Africa of caring for each other and the environment. The care for the environment and the natural resources emerge from the religious belief in the need to ensure harmony between the elemental forces and human beings. Achieving sustainable development, as stipulated in the SDGs, is a challenge if religion and the spirituality of people in different societies are not taken into account.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of religion in sustainable development and analyses the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a developmental framework to achieving sustainable development by 2030. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2015). However, there is a shift in the understanding of sustainable development as it was stipulated in the MDGs and how sustainable development is defined in the SDGs. In analysing the SDGs critically, it is evident that the religious dimension is missing. The religious dimension is, nevertheless, critical. Oduyoye (2001) argues that religion determines the shaping of the moral, socio-economic and political life of many societies in Africa.

This chapter provides a historical perspective on, and definitions of, the concepts 'development' and 'sustainable development'. It also discusses the role of religion in sustainable development. It engages Mercy Amba Oduyoye's (2001) four central themes of doing theology in Africa, namely community and wholeness; relatedness and interrelationships; reciprocity and justice; and compassion and solidarity as a theological lens for the analysis of sustainable development goals, with a focus on understanding Mother Earth.

Definition of development and approaches

The concept of development emerged shortly after World War II and during the postcolonial and Cold War eras (August, 2010; Biehl, 2013). According to Biehl (2013:103), the concept of development was an ideology of Western capitalism implying that societies in the Global South were to develop or "catch up" with Western societies in the North. Modernisation theorists defined development as the modernising and secularising of societies deemed as undeveloped and freeing them from ties to religion (Biehl, 2013). Thus financial aid and the provision of technical assistance became the means by which underdeveloped countries would develop. Financial aid flowed from Western countries and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to the countries in the Global South (August, 2010). Biehl (2013:98) further argues that in their view "religion was predominantly held as responsible for more traditional worldviews which seem to

impede development". Modernisation theorists regarded development as progress, evolution and economic growth in the countries of the Global South (August, 2010). These countries were regarded as backward and underdeveloped, and needed to develop like countries in the West. However, this approach was proven a fallacy by the second generation of development practitioners, who pointed out that economic growth was not a measure of development per se, as there were more aspects to development.

Consequently, in the 1970s development practitioners came up with other development approaches to correct the imbalances created by modernisation theory. These approaches entailed the elimination of dependency, global reformism, meeting basic needs and capacity building. Later on, more appropriate approaches of development were people-centred development, a rights-based approach and sustainable development (August, 2010; Biehl, 2013). Consequently, the culture and religion of the people targeted in development projects were taken into account, since culture and religion influence people's world view and the relationship to their environment (August, 2013).

Similarly, issues that concern women were not taken into account in the development agenda. It was Ester Boserup, a development practitioner, whose publication *Women's role in economic development* in 1970, brought into the limelight the fact that women were not taken into account and that they did not benefit from the economic growth. Until that time the status of women was not recognised as essential in the development equation (Momsen, 2010). As a result of Boserup's (1970) third world development work, Women in Development (WID) became a key approach to development. However, the WID approach was criticised because it regarded women as a homogenous group. In the late 1970s, the Women and Development (WAD) approach emerged that was led by white feminist women from the Global North who were fighting for gender equality. Again, the WAD approach was criticised, because it did not take into account the challenges that women in the Global South faced. Thus, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach in the 1990s recognised women's contribution to both public and private spheres, and took into account the different aspects of women's lives. It notes the importance of women and men working together.

In 2000, governments, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), and United Nations agencies globally started working towards achieving sustainable development through the MDGs and currently through the SDGs 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Now the focus of development is more on sustainable development.

What is sustainable development?

Several definitions of sustainable development have been suggested by different scholars from different academic disciplines. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present generation without depleting the natural resources so that future generations will benefit from the same. In the same context, Repetto (1986:15) describes sustainable development as a “developmental strategy that manages all assets, natural resources, and human resources, as well as financial and physical assets, for increasing long-term wealth and well-being. Sustainable development as a goal rejects policies and practices that support current living standards by depleting the productive base”.

Similarly, sustainable development has to be participatory and people-centred. Participation in development projects becomes a learning process that empowers people to understand their social reality (August, 2010). The essence of participation in development is for the people to take charge of their own lives and be able to solve their own problems (August, 2010). Participation is a people-centred approach that assists people to identify and act according to their own needs and priorities without external ideas imposed on them. Moreover, sustainable development advocates for the bottom-up approach and is inclusive, allowing women and the poorest to participate fully.

As a matter of fact, sustainable development takes gender issues into consideration. According to Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler and Wieringa (1997), women are regarded as environmental managers with specific skills and indigenous knowledge in environmental care. Hence, their involvement in any development is crucial to sustainable development. Women work closer to the environment than men, and women's relationships with the environment entail reciprocity, harmony, mutuality and interrelatedness as they depend on nature for meeting daily needs. Therefore, development is sustainable when it is people-centred, incorporates gender issues and is concerned with future generations.

Sustainable development goals

The SDGs – officially known as *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* – were adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Summit in 2015. The SDGs build on the MDGs. The MDGs had a lifespan of 15 years from 2000 to 2015 and they focused on ending extreme poverty and hunger, as well as on improving education, health, gender equality and creating global partnerships. The MDGs concentrated on development in countries in the Global South. Although most countries did not meet the targets of the MDGs, the

MDGs raised awareness of issues that help achieve sustainable development such as gender equality, women's empowerment and universal education.

The SDGs are a set of seventeen goals with 169 targets set to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental. The SDGs therefore include building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, and focus on the need to protect Mother Earth and her natural resources by combating climate change and protecting oceans and forests. Although the SDGs are regarded as holistic, integrated and universal, they miss the religious (spiritual) dimension.

Religion and sustainable development

Religion plays a significant role in society as it influences the world view, attitudes and values of individuals and communities (Hitzler, 2013). Religion contributes to the well-being of society in terms of social behaviour, economics and political participation. In the African context, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, between the physical and spiritual realms (Kanyoro, 2002; Ver Beek, 2002). Thus, religious beliefs and practices have to be considered in the planning and implementation of development if it is to be sustainable.

However, in the 1950s and 1960s, development practitioners and academics had no interest in the role of religion in development and regarded religion as a "development taboo" (Tveit, 2016:4). Thus, Tveit (2016:4) notes that development practitioners and academics avoided the subject of religion in their endeavours, as religion was perceived as "irrelevant for social development and at worst was an obstacle to the advancement of social development and human rights". The religious dimension is, nevertheless, critical; Oduyoye (2001) argues that religion determines the shaping of the moral, social, political and economic dimensions of many societies in Africa. Concurring with Oduyoye (2001), Tveit (2016:4) states that "religion informs peoples' understanding of what constitutes a 'good life', their hope, their self-esteem and belief in their own dignity and rights, their inspiration for asserting their dignity and rights, and their resilience in times of crisis". However, Tveit (2016) also argues that the role of religion has both positive and negative aspects.

Religion influences how people relate to each other and the environment. Thus, Hughes and Bennet (1998) argue that people's world view is determined by their religious beliefs. Religion is an element of people's identity and it influences the core of the lives of people in Africa – hence, the need to include religion in the sustainable development agenda. Therefore, a holistic approach which includes the spiritual aspect can assist to achieve sustainable development.

Mercy Oduyoye's life and work

Mercy Amba Oduyoye is a Ghanaian woman theologian and widely renowned as “the mother of African women’s theology” (Gathogo, 2010:1). Oduyoye was born in 1934 in Asamankese, Ghana to Reverend Charles Kwaw Yamoah and Mercy Yaa Dakwaa; her father was a minister in the Methodist Church (Gathogo, 2010; Smith, n.d.). She got married to Adedoyin Modupe Oduyoye, a Nigerian, in 1968. Her husband is an Anglican, but Mercy remained a Methodist, even after her marriage, and serves in the Methodist Church as a lay leader. She was educated in Ghana up to graduate level. However, she enrolled for her postgraduate studies at Cambridge University in England (Gathogo, 2010; Landman, 2007).

Oduyoye has been involved in the ecumenical movement since 1966, when she attended the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in Ghana (Smith, n.d.; Gathogo, 2010). From 1967 to 1970, Oduyoye was Youth Education Secretary of the World Council of Churches and later served as Youth Secretary for the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). In 1987, Oduyoye was appointed as the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and during her tenure of this office, she initiated the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-1998 (Landman, 2007). She became the first woman president of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 1997. Oduyoye, together with other African women theologians, founded the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) in 1989. The Circle is a “community of African women theologians who come together to reflect on what it means to them to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics, and social-economic structures in Africa” (Phiri, 2008:67). The Circle encourages African women theologians to research, write and publish books on issues that concern them. The first convocation of the Circle held in Accra, Ghana in 1989 brought together seventy women theologians from all over Africa.

Oduyoye has positively contributed towards and influenced the work and writings of African women’s theologies. She has written and co-edited several books and articles and her books include *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy* (1995), *Hearing and knowing: Theological reflections on Christianity in Africa* (1996a), and *Introducing African women’s theology* (2001). According to Pui-Lan (2004), the two main tenets of Oduyoye’s contribution to African women’s theology are inculturation and liberation. Oduyoye has written on several theological topics such as spirituality, anthropology, Christology, gender, poverty, culture and religion. Her main interest is how religion and culture influence the experiences of African women (Pui-Lan, 2004). Apart from being a writer, Oduyoye is also an educator, a poet, a mentor and a keynote speaker at several international conferences. She has received various international awards.

Oduyoye's theological perspective

This chapter engages Mercy Amba Oduyoye's (2001) four central themes of doing theology in Africa as a theological lens in an analysis of the SDGs and their relationship to Mother Earth. Oduyoye's (2001) theological themes, expounded in her book *Introducing African Women's Theology*, which she successfully presented as a holistic approach to sustainable development in the African context, will be utilised here. The themes are: (1) community and wholeness, (2) relatedness and interrelationships, (3) reciprocity and justice, and (4) compassion and solidarity. These theological themes describe the characteristics of traditional life in Africa of caring for each other and the environment. Care for the environment and natural resources emerges from the religious tradition of ensuring harmony between the elemental forces and human beings. Human beings depend on the environment for their well-being, but at the same time people are interrelated with God, other spirit beings and the environment. In this regard, Oduyoye's (2001) theological perspective is relevant to analysing the role of religion in sustainable development.

Community and wholeness

Community and wholeness are two essential components of the way African people live in communities. Human beings are interdependent and everyone is part of the community – the unborn, children, youths, the elderly and the ancestors. Individualism is unknown in the African sociocultural tradition. True humanity is expressed in communal life, where people depend on each other for self-understanding. This is passed on from generation to generation as is expressed in the maxim “I am, because we are” (Oduyoye, 2001:26). Other African scholars have described this as ‘*ubuntu* philosophy’. Thus, Mbiti (1969:108-109) also states that “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (see also Tutu, 1999:31; Musopole, 1994:13).

As life is community-oriented, Oduyoye (2001:17) argues that all are “sensitive not only to the needs of others but also to the well-being of the community as a whole”. The communal life leads people to care for the marginalised, the vulnerable and those at the periphery of the community as well as for the environment.

Wholeness means “all that makes for the fullness of life, and makes people celebrate life” (Oduyoye, 2001:34). In the African world view, the secular and the sacred belong together, unlike the Western view, which is dualistic and separates the secular and the sacred. Wholeness celebrates the well-being and wellness of all in all aspects of life – spiritually, physically, socially and emotionally. This is observed in times of harvest, the birth of a child, initiation to adulthood, puberty, marriage and death as people come together to celebrate or express their sadness (Chilongozi, 2017). In this

regard, theology done from an African perspective affirms the life-enhancing aspects of the African tradition and religion. At the same time, it resists the exploitation of people and the environment.

Relatedness and interrelationships

As noted above, in African cultures people live a communal life and life is expressed as a whole. Oduyoye (2001:35) states that “in the African religious worldview, God, the source of Being, other-spirit beings ... and human beings are in constant communication and interrelationships. This relatedness and interrelationship controls and directs human actions and relationships.” Human beings rely on the environment and nature as the source of food, shelter and energy (Oduyoye, 2001), hence, the need for a harmonious relationship with the whole of creation. In the African world view, the natural and physical realms are connected to the spiritual realm and these are interdependent. In other words, the African tradition has a holistic view of life (Oduyoye, 2001).

Oduyoye (2001) further notes that Mother Earth is the home for all living things – plants, animals and human beings. At the same time, it is also the habitat of spiritual beings and the survival of human beings depends on their health and wholeness. Rakoczy (2004) agrees with Oduyoye (2001) when she points out that all nature is interdependent and interconnected. The Earth’s web of life and ecosystem is interlocked, diverse and delicate, which means that when one part is disturbed, the whole becomes disturbed.

However, the truth is that things have changed in the African context (Momsen, 2010). There is ongoing depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation due to overpopulation, overgrazing and deforestation (Chilongozi, 2017). This has resulted in food insecurity, increased poverty, droughts and floods. In such cases, it is women who suffer the most as they walk long distances in search of water and firewood. In addition, Dube (2012) points out that globalisation and the coming of transnational corporations (TNCs)² also contribute to environmental degradation. Globalisation, with its ethics of maximising profits, exploits the environment through deforestation and sometimes land is taken away from locals to establish companies run by transnational corporations (Dube, 2012; Van Drimmelen, 1998).

Despite these challenges, African women theologians advocate for a spirituality of resistance and reconstruction (Oduyoye, 1996b). African women theologies enhance

2 Transnational corporations (TNCs), also known as multinational corporations (MNCs), are international companies working across the globe. Most TNCs originate from the Global North and they establish companies abroad in search of cheap raw materials and labour for maximisation of their profit and elimination of competitors (Van Drimmelen, 1998).

the life-affirming aspects of the African tradition and resist the life-denying aspects. Relatedness and interrelationships are crucial if we are to achieve sustainable development.

■ *Reciprocity and justice*

It is important to note that in Africa the principle of relatedness and interrelationships calls for reciprocity and justice (Oduyoye, 2001). Oduyoye (2001:36) argues that “throughout African communities, the moral obligations enforced include reciprocity and justice”. The struggle for gender justice, economic justice, social justice and environmental justice is what African women theologians are engaged in. This is evident in Oduyoye’s (2001:37) statement that “the injustice of having to struggle to have one’s humanity recognised and treated as such, all of this becomes the context of struggle reflected in women’s theology”.

The exploitation of natural resources, such as trees, has devastating results on the environment and human beings, as noted above. Food insecurity and travelling long distances to fetch water and firewood result in social and gender injustice, as women are the ones who do most of the household chores (Oduyoye, 2001). Women may not get the nutrition they need for their bodies to function properly.

Furthermore, global warming and climate change have resulted from human activities that have destroyed the ecosystems. The effects of climate change are devastating as nations experience droughts, floods and tropical cyclones. Habel (2000:1) argues that “global warming has become a frightening threat and crisis that threatens the very life of the planet earth”. In seeking justice, African women theologians in their theologising confront issues of injustice that women experience as well as the exploitation of the environment.

■ *Compassion and solidarity*

Compassion and solidarity are aspects of relatedness and interrelationship. It is compassion that leads women to live and to work together in solidarity, to feel hurt with those who are hurting, and to rejoice with those who are rejoicing (Oduyoye, 2001). According to Oduyoye (2001:37), “compassion is the wellspring of women’s solidarity that is evident in the many women’s organised groups, both in the traditional society and the contemporary women’s movements.” In the African context, women organise themselves in groups for good causes. They celebrate together in times of joy such as weddings and harvest, and they also mourn together in times of sorrow such as funerals and natural disasters.

Hospitality is one of the important virtues which expresses solidarity. Oduyoye (2001:46) argues that “hospitality is a word that generates themes of caring, providing,

helping, sharing and ‘ministering’ to the needs of others”. Caring for all people and even strangers is part of the African way of life. Thus, Oduyoye (2001:93) states that “offering and receiving hospitality is an indicator of the African life-force sustenance that is emphasised by both individuals and communities”.

Theological analysis of SDGs

The SDGs are the development frameworks that focus on achieving sustainable development by 2030. The seventeen SDGs are currently being implemented in all countries – developed and developing countries, although each country has its own challenges. The SDGs aim at ending poverty and hunger, protecting human rights, promoting gender equality as well as women’s and girl’s empowerment, combating inequalities within and amongst countries, building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and ensuring the lasting protection of the planet Earth and its natural resources (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs are interrelated and intertwined.

In analysing the SDGs critically, it becomes evident that the religious dimension is missing. The goals and the targets are well stipulated, but they miss one important aspect that would help to achieve sustainable development. Hence, Mercy Oduyoye’s (2001) theological themes (as listed above) are used in this chapter as the theological lens in analysing the role of religion within the context of sustainable development goals. Although the SDGs are interrelated, they are broad in scope. The SDGs aim at ridding the globe of poverty and hunger, inequalities and protecting the life-support systems of Mother Earth. However, this chapter analyses only four out of the seventeen SDGs and their relationship to Mother Earth. The four goals are selected according to the three thematic areas of the SDGs, namely social, economic and environmental. Goal 3, good health and well-being, will be analysed under the theological theme of community and wholeness, as it is related to the social dimension. Goal 15, life on land, will be analysed under the theological theme of relatedness and interrelationship, since it relates to the environment. Goal 8, decent work and economic growth will be analysed under the theme of reciprocity and justice, as it is related to economics, while Goal 10, reduced inequalities, will be analysed under the theme of compassion and solidarity, since it deals with social responsibility.

Community and wholeness as related to good health and well-being

Community is the way of life in the African context. Communal life entails caring for each other and the environment. The African world view is holistic as it regards life as a whole in all aspects – spiritual, physical, social, cultural and economic. Therefore, Oduyoye (2001:46) argues that the belief in God as the source and centre of all things is the “beginning of women eco-theology”. African women’s theologies

are a form of communal theology done within the African context whose point of departure is the experiences of African women. African women's theologies are life affirming and they resist the exploitation of human beings and the environment, because human beings depend on the environment for their livelihood. This theology recognises the impact of environmental degradation on the lives of people, especially women and children. It affirms the good practices in the communities and critiques the bad practices that are present in some communities that contribute to the degradation of the environment.

Similarly, wholeness is well-being and wellness in all aspects of life – physical, spiritual and emotional. Wholeness regards life as a whole and resists any aspect that threatens the well-being of the community, but rather promotes the life-flourishing aspects. SDG 3 focuses on “ensur[ing] healthy lives and promot[ing] well-being for all at all ages” (United Nations, 2015). In the light of promoting community and wholeness, it is important to note that health and healing cannot be separated from the well-being and wellness of human beings (Marais, 2015). Health, therefore, is understood as “encompassing the physical emotional, psychological and social domains” (Phiri & Nadar, 2006:9). At the same time, health is relational, which means that the healing of broken relations is crucial for the well-being of all members of the community. Therefore, Oduyoye (2001:53) grounds the concern for the health and healing of human beings in what she calls the “spirituality of care”. The spirituality of care involves mutual care, sharing, learning together, and nurturing the vulnerable and the less privileged. Thus, religion is complete with resources that can bring healing to the communities (Phiri & Nadar, 2006).

Relatedness and interrelationship as related to life on land

People are connected to each other, to God and to the environment. The theological understanding that God is the creator and sustainer of the whole of creation is crucial. “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters” (Psalms 24:1-2). God commissioned people to be stewards of his creation (Hughes & Bennet, 1998). As stewards, Christians need to respect and appreciate the creation, while at the same time having a sense of their interdependence with the environment (Hughes & Bennet, 1998). Caring for natural resources is crucial to achieve sustainable development. Similarly, religion plays an important role in caring for the environment as people appreciate natural resources as God-given.

SDG 15 aims to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” (United Nations, 2015). This goal is analysed in the light of the theological theme of relatedness and interrelationship. Protecting

and restoring ecosystems depend on how human beings relate to each other and the environment. Oduyoye (2001:35) argues that “religion that emerged in Africa was developed to ensure harmony between the elemental forces and humans”. Oduyoye (2001) further argues that spiritual connectedness arises from the ecological relationship. Therefore, religious observances and practices are key to sustainable development.

Reciprocity and justice as related to decent work and economic growth

Reciprocity and justice are required for peace and harmony in every community. Social, economic and gender justices are crucial in communities to ensure the well-being and wellness of all people and the environment. At times, environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources are a consequence of the injustices that are prevalent in our societies. Koopman (2015) argues that justice is inclusive of both the social and ecological bonds of life. Justice respects the human dignity of women and men who are created in the image of God. The SDGs aim at building peaceful, just and inclusive societies where human rights and gender equality are promoted. Such societies are possible, if the religious life (spirituality) of the people is recognised.

SDG 8 aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (United Nations, 2015). Analysing Goal 8 in the light of the theological theme of reciprocity and justice, it becomes evident that sustainable economic growth is only possible when there is economic justice. Trade liberalisation and globalisation are the challenges the world is facing today. Dube (2012) argues that religious fundamentalism is a consequence of globalisation. Dube (2012:384) further states that “fundamentalism supposedly rises due to the social insecurities created by liberalisation and privatisation, which hike living expenses and lead more people to find security in religion”. Economic justice is a prerequisite for sustainable development in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth. There is a need for fair trade between the Global North and Global South, as well as for respect for the economic rights of all people at all levels. In the African context, Oduyoye (2001:36) argues that “the moral obligations enforced include reciprocity and justice”.

Compassion and solidarity as related to reduced inequalities

In the African context, compassion and solidarity are important aspects of communal life. Compassion and solidarity are enforced by the relatedness and interrelationships between people and God. Compassion and solidarity promote the interconnectedness of reciprocity and justice. Oduyoye (2001) argues that solidarity in Africa is expressed through hospitality. The gathering together of people on

different occasions shows solidarity and compassion, whether it is at funerals or weddings. People share and encourage each other in times of crisis and celebrate together in times of joy. Communities can work together to protect the natural resources using the indigenous knowledge system available in their communities.

SDG 10 aims at reducing inequality within and amongst countries. The gap between the rich and the poor in many countries in the Global South is a consequence of economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (Dube, 2012). Justice, caring, solidarity and compassion are the expression of the divine image all human beings are expected to reflect (Oduyoye, 2001). Compassion is expressed in care for all humanity without counting the cost or expecting to receive back the same (Oduyoye, 2001). Compassion is the wellspring of solidarity as people organise themselves in groups or organisations that focus on caring for each other in times of need and celebrating together in joyful times. The religious values of compassion and solidarity can assist in reducing inequalities that present within and amongst nations.

Conclusion

This chapter has briefly discussed the historical perspective of the term ‘development’, what sustainable development is, and the role of religion in sustainable development. It has also discussed Oduyoye’s (2001) theological themes, namely (1) community and wholeness, (2) relatedness and interrelationships, (3) reciprocity and justice, and (4) compassion and solidarity. These have been engaged as a theological lens in analysing four SDGs.

In order to achieve sustainable development as specified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for people and Mother Earth, it is crucial that a holistic approach that is inclusive of religious realities be followed. Tveit (2016) argues that faith (religious) communities have an obligation to respect human dignity, to serve their communities, to protect creation as good stewards and to bear witness to the Supreme Being. Faith communities are “the key sources of social capital for sustainable change, transformation and hope” (Tveit 2016:6). In addition, Oduyoye (2001) points out that the liberation of Christ covers all creation as Christ restores the whole cosmos (Romans 8:20-23). The groaning of creation as in the pain of labour is to reconcile all things to God. Jesus Christ heals and restores nature, individuals and communities.

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